

# Runaway June

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## FIFTH EPISODE.

## A Woman In Trouble.

## CHAPTER I.

**F**AT old black Aunt Debby was dressed in her best marketing clothes, the green percale with the big yellow flowers, and the little blue hat with the nodding red poppies was set far forward on her tinkles wig. The marketing trip to the city had been one of Aunt Debby's chief joys, but today the buoyancy and the high pitched laugh of excitement were absent.

"You'll stop at Ned's for Mr. Moore, Debby," said Mrs. Moore.

"Yassum." Aunt Debby stole a glance at June's portrait on the wall. "You-you ain't heard nothin' yet of Miss June?"

At the sound of that name Bonner rose instantly, head up, ears perked, tail wagging, eyes eager, mouth open.

Where was June? That puzzling problem filled the entire mind of Aunt Debby as, by the side of the driver, she spun into the city in the Moore auto.

Where was June? A dozen private detectives were scouring the city of New York for her, and they reported to a stern faced young man who sat in the lonely apartments which June and he had fitted up to be their nest, his only companion a miniature of his lovely bride.

Where was June? Who was this mysterious Gilbert Blye? What was his power over Ned Warner's bride?

He seized his hat and strode forth into the streets in his never ending search for June.

At that moment the door of a strange house had slammed abruptly behind beautiful June Warner. And Gilbert Blye had furnished this address to June's employment agency.

A blonde looking page girl inspected June impatiently in the dim light of the hall, then with a significant grin left June standing there and swaggered through a door at the end of the hall. June was startled as that door opened and a blase of light came out with the chatter of many shrill voices. In there, amid wreaths of curling blue smoke, moved handsomely gowned women, and many of them nonchalantly puffed at cigarettes. At that instant the smiling Gilbert Blye's key grated in the lock.

A large, yellow haired woman came hurrying from the salon with June's employment agency card in her hand.

"Right this way, honey," she rasped in a voice to which the honey was foreign, and she led the way to a small side room at the left of the salon. As June reluctantly entered the strangely furnished little room at the left Gilbert Blye came in at the front door.

With a smile upon his lips and glinting in his dark eyes he hurried straight back toward the little room in which stood June, now alone and frightened.

At that instant a huge, clumsy maid came tumbling up from the basement, followed by a puff of yellow smoke. With her eyes distended and her mouth open, ready for the yell of "Fire!" she rushed to the door of the salon, but before she could reach it Gilbert Blye had her roughly by the arm and pushed her through the door which led to the basement. He stood staring at the smoke which came curling ominously through that opening, glanced again toward June's room and dashed down the stairs.

That was a strangely furnished little room in which June found herself. There were two desks and a filing cabinet and some office chairs, but there were a luxurious couch and dainty hangings, a soft rug and pink paneled walls and ceiling. It was all so incongruous. And the work—it was queer too. The yellow haired woman came in from the parlor presently and explained the posting into small blank books of many memorandum slips. Each slip contained the name of a woman and a sum of money. There were no slips for men, but there were index cards about men. June puzzled as to what sort of business this might be.

The page girl swished in with one of the memorandum slips. The yellow head, whose face was puffy and more highly colored than was wholesome, took the slip, looked at the name on it, frowned, shook her head and went out with the girl. She entered the salon and stood surveying the scene with cold abstraction. Around a long table sat the women whom June had seen. They all had cards in front of them and stacks of playing chips, and a rawboned woman sitting on a higher chair than the rest was dealing. The yellow haired woman fixed her attention on the gambler next to the dealer. She was a duffy blond with a feverish glitter in her eyes, and she was bent so intently upon the fall of the cards that she did not notice the door open and close.

Poor June! She glanced about her with growing repugnance. She was abjectly miserable, and suddenly she was sobbing.

In the gambling room the duffy blond who had played so feverishly staked and lost the last chip in front of her. She turned impatiently to look for the page girl. She met instead the cold, hard eye of the yellow haired woman, who quietly motioned her. The player rose reluctantly, and fright came into her face as she followed into the hall and to the little office where June had been installed.

"You've reached the limit, Mrs. Perry," announced the yellow haired woman, turning on the unlucky one sharply as she closed the door. Here is the L. O. U. Bella brought to me. I have not O. K'd it. It's only for \$50," faltered Mrs. Perry.

"I wouldn't O. K. it for 50 cents," snapped the other. "Now I want action. You'll telephone your husband from this room."

"No, no!" The woman wrung her hands. "I'll talk to him tonight!"

"I know that game," she scorned, and from June's desk she took an index card.

"Eight-o-eight-o Garden," she told the new secretary. "Ask for Mr. Perry and say that his wife wishes to speak with him."

"No!" cried Mrs. Perry hysterically and reached over June's shoulder to take the phone. The new secretary had made no move toward the phone. She was staring at the yellow haired woman in astonishment. That determined person was not one to wrangle in emergencies. She snatched up the phone herself and called the number.

"You women think I'm a mark," she scornfully stated to Mrs. Perry while she waited. You'd sting me for a thousand dollars rather than sting your husband for it. See this card? She held it out. It contained the name of Jackson W. Perry, his business address, his home address, his financial rating, probable income, clubs and telephone numbers. And the unfortunate Mrs. Perry seemed to shrink into hopeless despair as she realized the implacable organization against which she had pitted herself. "Mr. Perry, please." The yellow haired woman's voice had undergone a complete change. It was very pleasant of inflection, though it rasped. "His wife wishes to speak with him." She handed over the telephone, and June, seeing Mrs. Perry's unsteadiness, rose and compassionately gave the woman her chair. The yellow haired one walked calmly over to her own desk and took up the extension phone.

June looked at her hat and coat. She seemed quite bewildered. She could not quite understand what this was all about, but she did know that it was all



SHE SAW THE DARK, BLACK VANDYKED FACE OF GILBERT BLYE.

unpleasant and heartless and degrading. She was starting to go when something on Mrs. Perry's face touched her sympathies and held her.

"Yes, it's Gwen," trembled Mrs. Perry, her nervous fingers clutching desperately to keep the quaver from her voice. "I—I hope I haven't interrupted anything important."

"Not very." The man's voice could be heard distinctly outside the phone.

"Jack"—the voice was full of pleading—"I—I have to have some money!"

The frown of the yellow haired woman deepened as she listened to the man's reply.

"I know it's a week before my allowance is due," urged Mrs. Perry, and now she turned her eyes imploringly toward the stony, yellow haired one. "But I just must have it! Eight hundred dollars!"

The man's voice boomed an incredulous exclamation over the wire; then a sharp question.

"Why—why, it's to pay bills! Yes, yes, Jack, I know I was supposed to keep them paid out of my allowance! I didn't want to tell you this until we could sit down quietly together, only they're pressing me for payment! And the allowance isn't enough, Jackson! Yes, I know you've raised it—oh!"

The man's heavy voice had interrupted her calmly, quietly, coldly. She sank back limply in the chair.

June hung up the receiver. She was surprised to see the yellow haired woman put up her own phone and come across the room with a benign expression.

"Cheer up," she advised. "Hubby's all right."

Mrs. Perry straightened up.

"Yes," she said and moistened her lips. "He said that he'd go over those bills with me tonight."

"I heard him myself." And the yellow haired woman grinned across at June. "Here's your L. O. U., dearie. I've O. K'd it. You better go in and play awhile for your nerves."

The terrified little blond looked up incredulously. It was as if she had been given a drink of some strong stimulant, and she clutched eagerly at the memorandum slip. Perhaps with that she could win back all that she had lost!

"Thank you!" she gasped and hurried from the room.

The other woman grabbed her phone.

"Eight-o-eight-o Garden," she called. "Hello! Mr. Perry, please! This is his wife's friend."

June moved for her hat and coat.

"Hello, Mr. Perry! Say, your wife is at 48 Kingsley court gambling, and she's going to be exposed in half an hour if you aren't here to pay her debts."

The man at the other end of the wire apparently

took a moment to gasp for breath; then the wire boomed.

"All right, bring the police if you want," snapped the yellow haired woman. "I guess I can stand the notoriety if you and your wife can. And, say, checks don't go. Bring cash. It's eight-fifty now." June stood aghast. A gambling house!

## CHAPTER II.

**O**N the corner near Mrs. O'Keefe's home Officer Grady walked over to lift his cap politely and to help Marie across the street with her empty market basket. Two blocks up Officer Dowd carried her basket two blocks off his beat to where Officer Kernan held up the traffic both ways while she described the chicken people she intended to make for dinner. All this was, first, because the Widow O'Keefe's husband had been the most popular man on the force and, second, because Marie, plain of feature though she was, had found in herself an unexpected knack for pleasing policemen.

In the market June's maid, companion and protector, wandered from stall to stall, selecting her tiny purchases of fruit and vegetables. She was just deciding on the tremendously important selection of the chicken itself when suddenly an avalanche of flaming color fell upon her, and a voice cried:

"You, Marie! What's Miss June?"

Aunt Debby! Her two fat black hands were gripped on Marie's arm.

"I do not know you!" she declared.

"You don't know me!" Aunt Debby wheezed, her broad bosom jumping up and down. "You say you don't know me! Ain't I Debby? Ain't you Marie?"

"What's the matter here?" The gruff voice of a big policeman, Officer Dowd.

"I want that woman took in charge!" panted Aunt Debby, and she rolled her eyes.

"Oh, you do?" And the officer of the law turned on Marie an eye which was perfectly ready to be suspicious in spite of its disinclination. "What's the charge?"

The voice of Aunt Debby rose shrilly triumphant:

"She stole my pocketbook!"

"Well, what's that on your arm?" And Aunt Debby's eyes dropped as she saw the stern gaze of the policeman fixed on the rusty old hand bag which gripped her thick forearm. She had forgotten that detail in her planning. "Open it up," ordered the officer, who opened it himself.

"Well—well—well!" gulped Aunt Debby, her eyes batting. "She done stole my other pocketbook!"

"That's enough!" growled the officer. "No negro ever had two pocketbooks." The officer then dispersed the crowd that had gathered and started Marie and Aunt Debby in opposite directions.

"Jerry," she called as she climbed breathlessly to her seat by the driver. "I done seed Marie! And what she does Miss June is!"

The car was already started.

To Ned's they drove, and within five minutes after Aunt Debby's excited report Ned Warner and John Moore and three long and lanky detectives were headed for the market, with Jerry and Aunt Debby in front. At that point they scattered, and it was Ned whose inquiries after Marie led all the way to Officer Dowd.

## CHAPTER III.

**A** HEAVY jawed, firm mouthed, square headed and level eyed man stopped at the door of 48 Kingsley court and rang the bell with a vigorous jerk.

"Mr. Perry," he announced bluntly.

"Yes, sir," replied the impudent page girl, by no means abashed, and she threw open the parlor door.

"Right in here," she grinned as she switched on the lights for him and saw that he was oppressed by the fact of the drawn curtains.

The yellow haired woman found him standing solidly in the center of the room, facing the door.

"Where is my wife?" he loudly demanded.

"In a minute." The yellow haired woman was quite calm and collected. "I don't mind turning over a parlor to settle a domestic scrap, but I want my bill settled first. Eight-fifty."

"How do I know that she is guilty of gambling?"

How do I know that she is here?" The woman's lip curled.

"Want to see her with the goods? Well, Jackson, if you'll promise to behave I'll show her to you through a peephole."

The man's fists clenched convulsively.

"You'd better pass over my eight-fifty first," said the yellow haired woman.

"Just a minute, please." A sweet voice, low, gentle, cultured—no such voice as the man had expected to hear in this place. He was equally impressed when he turned and saw the beautiful young girl who had glided through the rear door, her face full of serious purpose.

"Who rang for you?" snapped the yellow haired woman, her eyes flaming with instant resentment.

"I stayed in this house for no other reason than to see Mr. Perry," announced June, with no trace of timidity about her.

"What do you know about this?"

"Mrs. Perry is in deep trouble and needs your help."

"She had no reason to be in trouble. I give my wife an ample allowance." The man turned from June.

"You give it." Across June's mind there flashed again the whole of her own vital problem—that whatever the wife has must come from the husband in the nature of charity. She saw herself again as the piteous little beggar before Ned, whom she loved, and she saw Mrs. Perry in that same attitude before this stern husband. "What right have you to call it a gift?"

The man stopped and turned to June with a puzzled brow. She had set astride him a new thought.

"This angel of mercy stuff is bad for profits," rasped the voice of the yellow head. "But I can't overlook a chance like this. I know your kind, Jackson Perry! You give your wife an allowance that covers everything but emergencies. You figure the plumber to come in three times a year, and if he comes in four she loses. If she has a mad passion to treat a few of her friends to ice cream sodas she has to wait till next month's allowance day. If she ever saved \$25 you'd reduce her pay! I'll bet this poor little wife of yours first got into trouble through losing \$2 in a friendly penny auction game, and she's been trying to overtake it ever since."

A gentle hand was laid on the man's arm.

"You will help her?" The low, sweet voice was full of more than appeal; it was full of trust and confidence.

There was a slight convulsive heaving of Perry's shoulders, but that was all. He drew out a pocket-book and counted some money into the yellow haired woman's hand.

"Now bring Gwen to me," he said.

With moist eyes June hurried from the room.

It was good to have found a refuge like this. It seemed far, far away from the New York which those two knew, and it was as if no one could ever find them here. They were safe. Safe!

Is one ever safe? As Ned Warner stood trying vainly to extract information from Officer Dowd June's car dashed by him, and he caught a glimpse of her.

Officer Dowd was astonished to have his particularly insistent questioner stop abruptly in the middle of a sentence and go dashing noddily after a street car. In half a block the young man gave up that absurd chase.

The traffic thickened just beyond, so that for three or four blocks Ned was able to keep sight of the car as it stopped and started. Finally it was blocked, and Ned was able to catch up with it. June was no longer among the passengers!

"There was a girl on your car wearing a fur cap with a green tassel!" breathlessly said Ned to the conductor.

"Bet your life."

"Where did she leave your car?"

"On the track."

Ned dropped off the car, left to his own logic. June had alighted somewhere within these last two blocks. One going farther west would in all probability have taken a more convenient car line. To the east lay a tenement district and a district of old, small houses. On the chance Ned struck east.

"Have you seen a girl wearing a fur cap with a green tassel?"

The young man with the yellow derby over one ear shifted his cigarette.

"I'll be the Patsy. What's the answer?"

He asked that question of countless people. On a corner where half a dozen streets and alleys had staggered themselves by running into each other Ned found a human being swaying gently in the breeze.

"Have you seen?"

Ned stopped after one glance into that vacuous face and one whiff from that far from vacuous breath.

"Pipe up, pal," husked the jiggled one. Ned went over his formula.

"Have you seen a girl wearing a fur cap with a green tassel?"

"Well, what do you think of that?" And it stopped swaying for a moment. "A guy with black whiskers," and the human being illustrated the Vandyke by a motion of his hand, "asked me the same thing."

Blye again! Ned clinched his fist. "Did you see the girl?"

The object winked.

"S none of your business!" he answered with great dignity and reeled away.

Ned gazed after him in perplexity. There was no use to question that fellow any further, but it was certain that the man had seen June. She had passed this way then. She was somewhere near. And Blye! Blye, too, had passed this way! Ned chose the most direct street, the one which led to a little fountain, where another street angled sharply into it. And this fountain was visible from the third floor windows of the Widow O'Keefe's house. Ned Warner's heart was full of murder.

Blye had passed that way, but he had gone up another street. Now he, too, in his wandering search for the runaway bride came down toward the little fountain from the other angle.

June looked out of the window. In the gathering dusk she saw without recognizing them the two men approaching each other, with the sharp cornered building between.

At the point and under the light they would meet Gilbert Blye and Ned Warner. And the husband of June had murder in his heart!

[TO BE CONTINUED]



BLYE HAD DASHED AFTER HER.

AUNT DEBBY MOURNING FOR RUNAWAY JUNE.